



Congressman Tim Bishop

FIRST DISTRICT -- NEW YORK

NEWS RELEASE

SEPTEMBER 13, 2004

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT: JON SCHNEIDER
PHONE: (631) 696-6500

HELP STILL NEEDED FOR INJURED 9/11 WORKERS

Bishop Announces Legislation to Fix Victims Compensation Fund

St. James, NY - Today at the St. James Firehouse, Congressman Tim Bishop announced his support for legislation to extend the September 11th Victims Compensation Fund (VCF) for personal injury claims and to remove misguided regulations on the fund that had blocked many injured rescue workers and area residents from eligibility. Bishop is an original cosponsor of the Victims Compensation Fund Extension Act, which was authored by Congresswoman Carolyn Maloney.

An injured 9/11 first responder from Selden explained today that he had not applied for the VCF because his illness developed more seriously after the fund's December 22, 2003 deadline.

"As a nation, we made a promise to help all those who suffered as a result of the heinous acts of September 11th," Bishop said. "Now we must keep that promise. We need to extend the Victims Compensation Fund, and open it up to rescue workers who were clearly injured from 9/11, but have been denied help."

"I am speaking today with anguish and concern," David McDonough, a New York City firefighter from Selden who spent hundreds of hours at Ground Zero beginning on 9/11 and has since been diagnosed with sarcoidosis of the lungs said. "My anguish comes from the fright of not knowing what the future holds for me and the concern is for my family."

McDonough has also been diagnosed with chronic sinusitis as well as asthma. He was placed on medical leave on February 13, 2004, well after the VCF application deadline.

"I know there are no guarantees in life, I know the risks," McDonough added. "On 9/11 I responded, and if I had it to do all over again, I wouldn't hesitate. I appreciate Congressman Bishop for supporting our first responders."

In addition to late-onset illness and inadequate outreach as potential reasons that those injured from 9/11 may have missed the original VCF deadline, time restrictions on VCF applicants were also questioned. Specifically, VCF criteria required applicants to have arrived for rescue and recovery operations within 96 hours of the attacks and for all injured claimants to have sought medical help for an injury within 72 hours, although the Fund's Special Master Kenneth Feinberg had some discretion over the latter criteria. Largely as a result of the VCF's misguided restrictions on applicants, 1,755 of the 4,430 personal injury claims considered were denied.

-continued-

“Just because you arrived at Ground Zero after September 15, it doesn't mean that you did not breathe in the same hazardous material,” Bishop said. “If we don’t help these workers, then as a nation, we should be ashamed.”

"Congressman Bishop is supporting our volunteer firefighters who have put their lives on the line," David Fischler, Director of Suffolk County Fire, Rescue, and Emergency Services said.

The Victim Compensation Fund Extension Act does the following:

- Amends eligibility rules so that responders to the 9/11 attacks who arrived later than the first 96 hours could be eligible if they experienced illness or injury from their work at the site.
- Amends eligibility rules so that those who did not seek immediate medical verification for their illness or injury from the disaster, but who have since obtained medical evidence, would be eligible.
- Extends the deadline for applications to allow those with either late-onset illness from the disaster or those who were never informed of their eligibility for the Victim Compensation Fund to consider applying.

#